



115 BANNATYNE AVENUE

THE BROKERAGE

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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Although the name "Brokerage" refers to one structure, the two component buildings must, for a time, be considered separately.

Both buildings were erected in 1899 and have continuously shared a common wall. 115 Bannatyne, the five-storey structure of the west portion, was built for Merrick-Anderson and Company by the architect John J. McDiarmid. This was a wholesale firm which was established in Winnipeg in 1882 by George A. Merrick¹ and Thomas A. Anderson. They acted as manufacturer's agents for several lines of stoves, ranges and furnaces. In addition, Merrick-Anderson carried heavy hardware, tin shop supplies, building paper, and bags of cotton and jute for use in the milling industry.² The firm would also pick up items on an introductory basis and then sell the rights if the line succeeded.

This wholesale business grew to require a great deal of space, and by 1906, the business employed fifty people. Merrick-Anderson had its original warehouses and offices separate, but decided to consolidate the operation in its new building. The new structure was five storeys high, 90 feet by 75 feet with the offices partitioned on the main floor and show rooms on the second floor.³ The architect and principal contractor of the warehouse, J.J. McDiarmid and Company, was an established Winnipeg firm that had formerly owned a lumber yard. McDiarmid had also designed and built the Marshall-Wells warehouse immediately west of there that same year, and the similarity in design is apparent. (see photographs in Appendix A).

The warehouse is made of solid brick, in the buff-coloured shades that are somewhat unique to Winnipeg. The brick and stone work was contracted to C.W. Sharpe and Son, another old local firm which specialized in bridges and commercial blocks. Sharpe's skill is exemplified in the ornamental plastering of the legislative buildings in Regina, and in the Great West Life Building on Lombard and the Carnegie Library on William.⁴

The structure is supported by six heavy brick piers which rest on a foundation of limestone. Stone is also used for lintels and lugsills, and for the voussoirs that arch across the rounded windows of the

main and fifth floors. A flat roof permitted heavy ornamentation across the cornice and around a parapet which has a carved panel dated 1899. There is also a fanciful bit of parquet brickwork around the window heads on the ground and top storeys. the overall effect of this ornamentation is delightful.

The west portion of the Brokerage was constructed in 1899 for Edward Nicholson, an Ottawa-born merchant who started a wholesale grocery brokerage firm. Nicholson had come to Winnipeg in 1882 and married into the Bawlf family,⁵ a wealthy family involved in the grain trade. Nicholson was prominent in Winnipeg society, and was involved in lacrosse and curling. In 1905, he made a partner out of his young accountant, Donald H. Bain, and the name of the wholesale commission firm was changed to Nicholson and Bain.

Donald Bain was born in Belleville, Ontario, and came west as a child. In 1949, he was installed as the nineteenth member of the International Hockey Hall of Fame for his excellence in amateur hockey. "Danny" Bain played centre and was later captain of the Winnipeg Victorias when they conquered Montreal to win the Stanley Cup in 1896, and again in 1901.⁶ In addition, Bain was also a champion figure skater and cyclist. He lived in a beautiful home in Armstrong Point, where he raised several children, until his death in 1962.⁷

Nicholson and Bain did a lively trade in the wholesale business as brokers and commission agents for particular grocery items. The company expanded to Edmonton and Calgary in 1909, and by 1930 had added branches in Vancouver, Regina, Saskatoon, Fort William and Montreal as well. In 1917, Bain became the sole owner and the business was renamed the Donald H. Bain Company. Thomas Anderson, partner in the neighbouring building at 115 Bannatyne, died in 1919 and the Merrick-Anderson wholesale stove and hardware firm was sold. G.A. Merrick continued in another form of business until 1927.⁸ Bain purchased the Merrick-Anderson Building in 1920 and joined it to his building at 113 Bannatyne. A building permit was taken out that year for interior alterations to this effect but it is not apparent exactly what structural changes took place.⁹

The original Bain Building was three storeys high and built of solid brick. The architect cannot be confirmed, but it seems likely that it was also J.J. McDairmid. The design of the Bain Building is very similar to the Merrick-Anderson and the Marshall Wells buildings, albeit their general design was absolutely typical of most turn-of-the-century warehouse structures. It is perhaps the joyful use of brick and stone detailing that seems to unify these two structures. The Bain Building at 113 Bannatyne also has its top storey windows with rounded heads and parquet brickwork between the windows. Although the cornice is arcaded, the scale and effect of the pattern is similar to the Merrick-Anderson block, and the treatment of the windows and walls on the lower floors is near identical. Early photographs show the wood doors and mullions to be the same pattern. Height, and the fenestration of the main floor are the main differences between the two structures.

This area east of Main Street had long been used for warehousing because of its proximity to the docks during the days of steam on the Red River. Ship Street, a block which runs by the river between east Bannatyne and McDermot, recalls these early days.¹⁰ When the railways replaced the rivers in the 1880s, a new warehouse area opened west of Main and left the riverbank area a mixture of wooden warehouses and decaying residences. The new brick warehouses on Bannatyne in 1899 were part of movement which left the area entirely commercial. A spur line from the CNR gave Nicholson and Bain the rapid access to transportation that the grocery business required, and several large wholesale grocery businesses were established in that immediate area.¹¹ That track remains behind the structures to the present, but loading docks at the rear supplement the moving of goods.

The few lots east of 115 Bannatyne have supported such small buildings as an office for a coal yard, small storage shacks, and parking lots. The south side of Bannatyne across from these buildings seems never to have been developed.¹²

Operating from the double building, the Bain commission merchants' business thrived. The area was flooded in 1950, but business carried on until the warehouse was vacated in 1970. The building stood vacant until it was purchased by Tom Dixon in 1976, with a price tag of \$125,000. Dixon powder blasted the exterior and the massive fir beams and joists are now exposed.¹³ Dixon sold the

"Brokerage" to its present owner, Michael Dector, who has furthered the renovation to the point where rental space is once again available. New windows, modern services such as elevators and a sprinkler system, and the appeal of brick and natural wood are offered within 1200 feet from Portage Avenue.

The building's facades are unchanged in eighty years. Cosmetic changes in windows, awnings, signage and landscaping have updated them, but the rich brick and stone details remain.

Footnotes--

1. Some later sources give the name Joseph A. Merrick.
2. Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 60.
3. "Report on Merrick-Anderson Warehouse", Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, Ottawa, p. 2.
4. Ibid., p. 4.
5. Free Press, October 9, 1923.
6. Tribune, October 22, 1949.
7. Free Press, August 15, 1962.
8. Free Press, May 12, 1952.
9. City of Winnipeg, permit no. 260, April 8, 1920. The contractor was F.W. Gay, and the cost of the alterations was \$4,500.
10. Val Werier "Trees and Flowers and Some Nice History", Tribune, June 30, 1978.
11. Codville's on Westbrook and the Manitoba Produce Building on Bannatyne. Later, the Waldhorn wholesale grocers at 123 Bannatyne and the Manitoba Co-operative Honey Producers.
12. From Henderson's and photographs.
13. Werier, op. cit.

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Plate 1 – A view looking northeast, c.1902, Merrick Anderson and E. Nicholson buildings are on right (arrows). Nearby these early brick structures are many wood warehouses as well as parts of the old residential area. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Views 133/115.)

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Plate 2 – Bannatyne Avenue, ca.1902. The similarity of all three buildings is clearly visible.
(Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Views 133/393.)



Plate 3 – Bannatyne Avenue, ca.1910, after the formation of Nicholson and Bain Company.
(Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Stovel Advocate Collection, #65.)